CFLJ COMMENTARY

The Time for Reckoning is Here!

The Center for Law and Justice, in partnership with the New York State Writers Institute at the University at Albany, proudly announces the launch of an online symposium examining systemic racism in Capital Region criminal justice systems. Our goal is to raise awareness, foster dialogue, find common ground and work collectively to create a more just society. Produced in the wake of national and local public outrage over the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, The Time for Reckoning: Confronting Systemic Racism, Seeking Justice and Reimagining Society presents four themed weeks in October addressing community concerns. The symposium culminates during the week of October 26, when public TV station WMHT will air a segment of its New York Now program devoted to The Time for Reckoning symposium.

The theme for this first week of The Time for Reckoning (week of Oct. 5) is the impact of systemic racism on policing in Capital Region communities. You can now view a video of the May 30th Albany Run/Walk/Rally for Black Lives, in which All of Us, Citizen Action, Justice4Dahmeek, and other community groups held a speak out and a run/walk in solidarity with protests being held around the nation in response to the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and other people of color. You can read the Center for Law and Justice’s report, Pathway to Reformative Change: Public Safety, Law Enforcement, and the Albany Community, produced in response to the shooting of 19-year-old African-American Ellazar Williams by Albany Police Department Detective James Olsen.

Also during this first week, on Friday, October 9th at 7 p.m. the symposium will premiere a video of Shawn Young, co-founder of the local activist group All of Us, speaking with fellow community members about how systemic racism affects their communities and what needs to be done to address it. On Sunday, October 11th at 7 p.m., The Time for Reckoning will premiere an illuminating conversation with the Center for Law and Justice Executive Director Dr. Alice Green and Robin DiAngelo, author of White Fragility, on the far-reaching impacts of systemic racism. The discussion is moderated by Paul Grondahl, Times Union columnist and Director of the New York Writers Institute.

Most excitingly, The Time for Reckoning provides a platform for Capital Region residents to speak their truths through their artistic talents and activist activities. A generous gift from the Steve McKee Foundation of Troy is underwriting the symposium, and providing microgrants to be awarded to local activists, grassroots community groups, artists, writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers and people of all ages, especially students, who are actively engaged in collaborative efforts to address systemic racism. Proposals are now being accepted; interested community members can find a simple, five-question microgrant application on The Time for Reckoning website.

In the second week (week of Oct. 12), the symposium will highlight issues of trust between community members and the government officials who serve them -- particularly the police. The third week (week of Oct. 19) will explore possible avenues of reform to ameliorate systemic
racism. New videos and other materials will be added often --- please check the website frequently!

The fourth week (week of Oct. 26) will address accountability --- how can the community monitor government actions to guard against further injustices due to systemic racism? This final week features a panel discussion moderated by Times Union Editor Casey Seiler, featuring Mayor Kathy Sheehan, Common Council President Corey Ellis, and Police Chief Eric Hawkins answering questions from the community about systemic racism, to be aired on WMHT’s New York Now program on October 26. (District Attorney David Soares did not acknowledge several CFLJ invitations to participate.) The Time for Reckoning will also feature panel discussions with officials from Schenectady and Troy.

The Center for Law and Justice and the New York Writers Institute are joined by collaborators WMHT, the Times Union, the Justice Center of Rensselaer County, All of Us, Youth FX, the Steve McKee Foundation, Amnesty International USA, and other community partners. In addition to local community members sharing deeply personal experiences about race in conversation, prose, poetry, drama, and film; nationally renowned experts on racism talking with local personalities; and government officials from Albany, Schenectady and Troy responding to constituents’ concerns about systemic racism, The Time for Reckoning symposium offers a wide variety of resources for further study and action by people of all ages.

We invite everyone from the Capital Region and beyond to join The Time for Reckoning: Confronting Systemic Racism, Seeking Justice and Reimagining Society beginning October 5th at https://www.timeforreckoning.org.